

## Thumbnail history highlights Western accomplishments

by **Bob Autobee**

**A**lthough only 23 years old, Western has faced numerous challenges and made significant strides, sometimes under strained conditions. The same is true today. Perhaps, by taking stock in the past, we can gain some guidance for the future.

For more than two decades, Western Area Power Administration has adapted to changes in the power industry while upholding a century-old mandate to deliver reliable, cost-based hydropower to customers across 15 states.

Before Western was created in 1977, the Bureau of Reclamation built a number of multi-purpose water development projects across the West. Reclamation sold surplus power from these projects to local residents and industries that repaid the cost of construction to the Federal government. By mid-century, Reclamation's construction of Hoover and Grand Coulee dams, and participation in the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program, put the irrigation agency in the unlikely role of the West's pre-eminent power provider.

An oil embargo during the mid-1970s forced the nation to re-examine its petroleum consumption and consider alternatives to fossil fuels, such as hydropower. Subsequently, Congress established Western on Dec. 21, 1977. The specific language is found in Section 302 of Public Law 95-91, the Department of Energy Act of 1977. The act transferred Reclamation's authority over power marketing and transmission to a yet-to-be-named power marketing administration.

Construction of transmission lines dominates the list of Western's accomplishments. In the late 1980s, the Administration connected the nation's Eastern and Western power grids through converter stations at Miles City, Mont., and Sidney, Neb. In 1993, Western completed the California-Oregon Transmission Project—a 500-kV, 346-mile power line linking the big cities of California to the

hydropower resources of the Pacific Northwest.

Throughout its history, Western worked with customers to create policy, set rates and create integrated conservation and energy resource plans. A continuing example of this cooperation is the public's involvement in developing Western's 20-year marketing plans. These plans ensure customer certainty and stability in repaying the Federal investment in power facilities.

In 1995, Western published the final Energy Planning and Management Program rule. The rule implements section 114 of the Energy Policy Act of 1992 requiring Western customers with long-term firm power contracts to prepare integrated resource plans.

These plans evaluated the full range of alternative sources of energy, including new generating capacity, power purchases and energy conservation and efficiency. Western implemented the integrated resource plans to enhance its customers' competitive position in an increasingly deregulated market.

Since the mid-1990s, Western has played a role in the nation's changing electricity industry. Agency staff are participating in the nationwide Regional Transmission Organization process as part of Western's commitment to open transmission access. In 1998, Western entered new markets by contracting to sell Federal power to 25 Native American tribes in the Upper Midwest as part of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program's post-2000 marketing program.

Today, Western serves 643 wholesale power customers over 16,819 circuit-miles of transmission lines and markets more than 10,000 megawatts of power from 55 hydropower plants in 15 Western states—a service territory covering 1.3 million square miles.

**(Note: Autobee is compiling historical information on Western's first 25 years.)**



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